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A Portrait of Hope: A Beginning Teacher Learns about Community

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A Portrait of Hope: A Beginning Teacher Learns about Community

Abstract

A question listed in the call for this issue was: *What are the sources and examples of hope for teachers, school leaders, and students as experienced and gained through learning, ..., [and] community connections?* This portrait of a beginning teacher's experiences learning about community as she navigates her first year of teaching provides a way for readers to think about how to develop community within a classroom and school, the roles members of a school community play in community development, and how mentoring may influence community building. Through portraiture methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) the reader will glimpse a deeper view of Maria in her first year of teaching and as a veteran teacher. Maria's approach to the tragic death of several parents in her school community helped both children and adults experience a sense of community, renewal, and hope in a very difficult time.

A Portrait of Hope: A Beginning Teacher Learns about Community

Introduction

I will tell the story of a beginning teacher who, through her experiences in a time of death and loss, was able to create hope for herself, her students, and her school community. This portrait of Maria, interwoven with examples of mentorship by her supportive principal and mentor teacher, may offer insights into how one teacher created a community in her classroom and school during a difficult time, and how her mentors helped her integrate into the school community during her first year of teaching. This portrait also explores how relationships developed within the context of community helped create a supportive and learning-filled community to help both children and adults make sense of the happenings of their lives.

Portraiture Methodology Overview

Portraiture methodology (Lightfoot, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) was used to create this view of Maria (a pseudonym) and a series of events that occurred during her first year as a teacher. The portrait presented here is excerpted from a longer portrait due to its length. A word portrait is shaped by a dialogue between the researcher (portraitist) and the participant (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). As the portraitist of this study, I used the essential elements of portraiture: context, voice, and relationship as lenses through which the emergent themes came into view. The aesthetic whole, the portrait that is written, gives the participant and the reader of the research an opportunity to step into the story of the participant as well as the researcher. In portraiture the researcher's voice is present through her or his own understanding of the setting. Producing "a full picture of an event or person that tells as much about the subject as it does the researcher, or portraitist" (Chapman, 2007, p. 157) and makes the research presented through portraiture applicable to those from a variety of areas of interest – not only

practitioners and scholars. Portraiture is a methodology that seeks to “combine systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3).

The search for what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) call “goodness” (p. 9) is in contrast to research methodologies documenting failures that can often evoke a feeling of hopelessness. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis explain goodness in portraiture in this way:

Portraiture resists this tradition-laden effort to document failure. It is an intentionally generous and eclectic process that begins by searching for what is good and healthy and assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfections. The researcher who asks first “what is good here?” is likely to absorb a very different reality than the one who is on a mission to discover the sources of failure. But it is also important to say that portraits are not designed to be documents of idealization or celebration. In examining the dimensionality and complexity of goodness there will, of course, be ample evidence of vulnerability and weakness. (p. 9)

Critiques of portraiture (English, 2000; Hackmann, 2002) may offer points for further dialogue in the exploration of paradox in the methodology in such themes as truth-seeking, goodness, or stance of the researcher. These themes are important considerations in learning more about the methodology and are welcomed dialogue by this researcher. Hackmann (2002) makes the point in his critique, citing the work of Fullan and Miles (1992), that “reform initiatives fail when educators act on incomplete information, misunderstand the change process, or simply refuse to change” (p. 58). The challenge that Hackmann offers in his critique of portraiture is for practitioners to “see themselves” in the research, otherwise change is unlikely and the research “will merely sit on a shelf, collecting dust” (p. 58). I invite practitioners and

researchers alike into a view, through this portrait, of many educational issues. Each one viewing the portrait may come away with different ideas but this is what I believe portraiture can do: invite the dialogue about our views.

Portraiture Process

This portrait was taken from a larger study of 10 candidates who participated in a study about their beginning mentoring and teaching experiences. I interviewed Maria several times based on prepared questions and follow-up probes. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Participant checks were conducted to ensure the accuracy of the data. I also conducted site visits to Maria's classroom and school. Each time I interacted with Maria in her classroom and school, I made notes in what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) call the "Impressionistic Record" (p.188). I recorded my ongoing observations and reflections from my interviews and interactions as they were happening, and as I transcribed and listened to the tape recordings, on multiple occasions. Often, as I observed or listened to the tape recordings I would note a tone of voice, or repeated phrase, or a question to follow-up on at a future meeting. The reflections made in my recording of my Impressionistic Record would often help me plan for future visits with Maria and highlight additional themes to review in greater detail.

Listening to the tape recordings of the interviews while making the transcription of the tape recorded interviews, rereading the transcriptions as I listened to the tape recordings, and referring to my notes in my Impressionistic Record and from site visits, I began to construct the word portrait of Maria. I used multiple interchanging aspects of each of the lenses – context, voice and relationship – allowing for an initial shaping of the emergent themes of Maria's portrait. After multiple readings and editing of Maria's portrait, I sent the portrait to Maria for her review and then scheduled a meeting to discuss her feedback. Her feedback and our dialogue

was noted and used in shaping the final portrait. It is through the layering of all these components that triangulation occurs in portraiture.

In the next section I will discuss the definition of “community” as used in this article, and present related literature.

Definitions of Community and Supporting Literature

The definition of classroom and/or school based community used in this article is based on a developmental model. Schaps and Solomon, writing in 1990, described the first step in promoting community as taking into consideration the “prosocial development” of and among children, focusing on interpersonal awareness and the ability to balance one’s own needs with the needs of others as well as on kindness and consideration for others (p. 39). I echo this developmental approach in my own definition of community, stressing as a primary value the ethic of care for everyone, and extending this ethic of care approach to taking responsibility for our actions and how our actions affect not only ourselves but others and the environment of the classroom and school. The type of community described in this article is not just a group of children and adults banded together by proximity or purpose alone. It is also demonstrated in how the children and adults treat each other and how they think and feel about each other.

This is the type of community I have always strived to form in my classrooms or the schools I have led. Combining an ethic of care with personal responsibility can create an opening for a reciprocal type of care to begin to flourish. From this type of reciprocal care for each other and our environment, I have found that the value of respect can grow and be experienced. Caring and respect, present in action and observable among a group of people in relation to one another - this defines community for me.

A definition of community can also be shaped by what it is not. Lewis, Schaps and Watson (1996), citing the work of Palmer (1986), define caring in the classroom as:

A learning space needs to be hospitable, not to make learning painless but to make the painful things possible . . . things like exposing ignorance, testing tentative hypotheses, challenging false or partial information, and mutual criticism of thought. [None of these] can happen in an atmosphere where people feel threatened or judged. (p. 21)

An environment in which caring and respect is not present can make it difficult to maintain the vulnerability which is needed to learn.

Another definition by Schaps and Lewis (1999) in a study of The Child Development Project, defines community “as a student’s experience of being a valued, influential member of a group committed to everyone’s growth and welfare” (p. 216). The concepts of being committed to not only one’s own growth but to those of the other members of the community are a central component of this definition of community.

Creating Community within Schools

Lewis, Schaps and Watson (1996) named five principles of practice for schools to become “caring communities of learners”: (a) warm, supportive, stable relationships; (b) constructive learning; (c) an important, challenging curriculum; (d) intrinsic motivation; and (e) attention to social and ethical dimensions of learning (pp. 17-20).

Schaps and Lewis (1999) continued their work with the Child Development Project and outlined five areas that educators interested in creating community should consider. The first is “‘caring’ doesn’t mean ‘easy’” (p. 216). The authors expand on this theme by contrasting the fine line educators must walk with their students to make the academic component of school challenging while creating an environment in which students feel safe to express themselves and

everyone is supporting each other's academic successes (Schaps & Lewis, 1999, p. 216). Second, "teachers are still central in the student-centered classroom" (Schaps & Lewis, 1999, p. 217). The role a teacher takes in the delicate balance between acting as facilitator of learning, and taking an expert role not only with consideration of the content of the curriculum but in pedagogy/instructional practices used in the classroom, is vital (Schaps & Lewis, 1999, p. 217). Third, "schoolwide change is essential" (Schaps & Lewis, 1999, p. 217). Interestingly, in their study, in the schools in which change was embraced by less than half of the faculty, students faced a sing-song effect of going between classrooms where building community was a primary agenda and classrooms that were impersonal and in which community was not a focus. The authors determined this was more harmful to the students than trying to build community in the first place. A fourth area was "school values must be examined" (Schaps & Lewis, 1999, p. 217). The content of those values were central to this component of building community and this relates directly back to the teacher's role in the classroom. For example, the teacher's authority and use of extrinsic classroom based rewards were discussed as potential issues that could cloud school values. Lastly, "assessment must be aligned philosophically with instruction" was a component of community building outlined by Schaps and Lewis (1999, p. 217). For example, if state based assessments are given based on individualized, competitive processes, and the students have not previously experienced this type of assessment, the results from the assessment may not demonstrate what the children truly know and have mastered.

Others, writing on the development of the concept of professional learning communities (DuFour, 2004, 2007; DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, 2002; Hord, 1997; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006) offer a foundation for the continued study of community within the

school. What I have been thinking about is how these writers focusing on professional learning communities, along with others in the area of educational leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008; Fullan, 1998, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Palmer, 1993, 1998, 2007; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1994; Wheatley, 1992, 1999, 2005) might come together with educational researchers, policy analysts, politicians, teacher educators and practitioners to examine how the formation of community may be at the heart of the work we all do.

With these definitions of community and learning communities in mind, I present Maria's portrait.

A Portrait of Maria

The fall leaves were turning beautiful shades of orange, yellow, and red as I drove to Maria's school. The view of the mountains was breathtaking. The area has a rural feel but it is not far from the hustle and fast-paced life of the city or suburbs. The small change in the altitude makes the air crisp and clean smelling as I walk across the parking lot to check in at the main office. The main building has a familiar feel with busy kids moving in and out past the office as I check in and wait for the principal to receive me. After the principal gives me a tour of the main building she walks me out to the darling little house which is Maria's classroom (Impressionistic Record).

This former home has been reconfigured to accommodate a classroom with work areas for science, and lots of storage for curriculum and materials. Every inch of the main classroom space clearly evidences a project in progress and screams, "This is a place where learning is going on." The seventh grade students sitting at the tables are actively engaged in a discussion from an earlier presentation and are just about to begin the hands-on project. The students accept

me with an air of being used to having adults come and go through their classroom space. The bulletin boards are bright and cheery with all available display space being used. Even the restrooms' walls have been decorated by these middle school students. The girls' restroom reminds you that "girls are cool" and to "watch out for girl power!" I move around the classroom watching as the students work on the hands-on project. Maria moves around the room answering questions, offering suggestions and feedback to her students. The students are making a paper box from one sheet of paper. There is a feeling tone that spills from the classroom that says this is a fun project! It is a project in which creativity comes out through drawing and which also allows students to let off a little steam by moving around. The students soon find, though, that it is a challenging project, and the noise level rises as they talk with each other and offer help and suggestions (Impressionistic Record).

As the students work it is clear that collaboration is valued within this group of students. As the students clean up, I help out with recycling paper left over from the project, and note how the students work together cooperatively and help each other with the project, offering positive suggestions to each other. This is a very familiar scene for me. It is the middle schooler dance of give and take, with some showing off for each other, others teasing and pushing the limits, but Maria is not bothered at all and plays along seamlessly with the verbal give and take. She has danced this dance many times before and handles it like the seasoned veteran she is. One student really pushes the limits and finally gets a caution from Maria and immediately draws back a bit. There is a settled feeling in her class; one in which most students know the limits and expectations and adhere to them. Maria's classroom procedures are clearly defined, and exemplified by how the students clean up after the project and get ready to change classes. As the class period ends, the eighth graders who have home room in this space wait patiently outside

the entry door until the seventh graders pack up and leave. They too enter the classroom and get packed up for the end of the day in an efficient manner, but still with the enthusiastic give and take of teenagers. Maria calls the students to their closing activities for the day and reminders for tomorrow. Her ability to relate to each individual student is evidenced by her personalized reminders and remarks to many of the students as they leave for the day. She seems to enjoy the banter with them as they ask the last few remaining questions of the day (Impressionistic Record).

Maria invites me to sit at one of the tables and walks over to the kitchen area to make coffee. With her coffee mug in her hand she begins describing her first year of teaching as being welcomed into a community atmosphere at the school which began during her interview process for the position. Maria describes her experience as “being pulled into community” and given “a ton of support” (Personal Communication). Maria mentions that she had two mentors during her first year who really helped her understand the importance of community at the school. One mentor was Rosa, a teacher from another grade level, who had invited Maria to enter into a mentoring relationship, and whose class was assigned to partner with Maria’s class for school-wide activities. Maria’s other mentor was her principal, Pat.

Maria explained that her principal, Pat, did not “sugar coat things” but that she appreciated this “as you knew where you stood with her” (Personal Communication). Maria’s principal gave her small, accomplishable tasks, concrete things to do and compliments along the way. Maria explained how from the first time Pat assigned her to work on a faculty committee, she encouraged Maria by offering a balance of both positive and thoughtful, critical critique. Pat was also very supportive in Maria’s formal teaching evaluations. “It was not like she didn’t offer

insights or areas to improve on, but she always had a compliment about a lesson she observed or work you did” (Personal Communication).

Maria stresses that Pat provided leadership in making the establishment of community within the school a priority. Without the establishment of time to go for out for drinks and snacks after school, and celebrating with parties during the holidays, there would not have been opportunities for relationships and community to grow. Maria recalls that during her interview she was asked by the interview panel how she would feel about going out after school together to socialize and attending parties to celebrate at holidays. Her memory of that interview over 20 years ago is still very vivid and her face is animated as she speaks (Impressionistic Record). She said, “Sounds like fun!” (Personal Communication) and states that this is one reason she felt pulled into her new community from the very beginning.

Maria explains that her principal, Pat, also valued making time for mentoring to occur. Pat balanced such things as time for meeting formally, such as faculty meetings, with ensuring that as a beginning teacher, Maria had time without other duties to talk with her mentor teacher, Rosa. Maria reiterates that she felt invited into her school community, and this invitation and acceptance was the form the effective mentoring she received took.

Maria described how her mentor teacher, Rosa, would stop in at the end of every day to ask how Maria’s day had gone, and to share the events of her own day. This daily ritual of stopping in and sharing how the day went continued not only in the beginning years but every year Maria worked at the school. The story Maria tells to illuminate this daily stopping in to share revolves around a particularly sad grouping of events within the community, involving the deaths of several parents of students in the school. Though the school community had faced the

death of one parent from a long illness and a sudden death of another due to an accident, two other deaths of parents in the school community were due to suicide.

During one of her after school chats with her mentor teacher, Rosa, Maria shared her concern about searching for a way to help her students cope during this difficult time. Maria felt the students' questions about what had happened and the deaths should not be brushed off or the subject changed. Maria expressed that she needed to do something more than she was doing for her students to promote "healing" (Personal Communication).

From this initial chat her mentor teacher, Rosa, shared a story about her own experiences with a death that had occurred in the school community years before. Rosa shared how she worked with her principal to prepare lessons on topics related to death and dying and then to also include parents in the lesson planning process and in the lessons. Maria's mentor teacher told her how she and other faculty members had used community activities to honor those in the school community who had died by planting a rose bush and a tree, but how as time passed the rose bush and tree had been forgotten and other plants had grown over them and they were no longer a focal point in the school landscape.

This initial chat grew into extended conversations and discussions after school. Soon the discussions became planning sessions for lessons and activities. Later that school year a new garden was being planned. A community garden renovation project was initiated by Maria, her mentor teacher, and their students. The students studied not only about gardening but about dying, death, community service, outreach, and most importantly about empathy for their fellow classmates who had experienced the death of a loved one.

The students, with the support of their teachers, the principal, parents, and community businesses, also learned about gardening, and designing a garden, and then came together with

their parents and the entire school community to work, plant, and make a beautiful garden space to honor all those in their school community who had died. The students in Maria's and Rosa's classes led a commemoration ceremony to open the garden and the whole school community came together to celebrate the learning and work in creating the garden and honoring the families named in the garden project. Maria, Rosa, and their current and future students committed to a long-term service project maintaining the garden.

From a small after school chat, and time given by her mentor teacher to listen and share, and with the support of her principal, a community was given an opportunity for healing, and the focus on community building in her classroom and school flourishes and is vital and life giving today. As we took a walk to the garden, Maria was oddly silent. Then as the garden came into view and we took in the scene together, she said in a quiet, but firm voice, "I was welcomed into a community and they kept me centered" (Personal Communication). Maria created a community within her classroom and school then, and she continues to do that today. I reflect as I leave the garden that it seems the legacy of community that was shared with Maria is continuing to be shared – those are lucky students to be in her care (Impressionistic Record).

Analysis of the Portrait

In the following sections, I will examine several emergent themes the portrait of Maria illuminates relating to different aspects of community including leadership of her principal, teacher relationships, mentoring relationships, time for mentoring, and aspects of community development among students, parents, guardians, and the greater community in which the school was situated.

Community Connections

Maria's portrait demonstrates a community building process that is aligned with the definitions and descriptions of community in the work of Schaps and Solomon (1990), Schaps and Lewis (1999), and Lewis, Schaps and Watson (1996) in that Maria and her mentor teacher, Rosa, focused on the interpersonal needs of the children in their care and also worked to balance their own feelings about the deaths that had occurred. The sensitivity required to even begin to approach the topic of death with elementary-aged students was an area in which Maria believed she needed complete support from her mentor teacher and principal. She wanted to be thoughtfully prepared to lead discussions or answer questions raised by her students as well as learn how, as a beginning teacher, to address topics such as death with her students' parents and guardians.

The need for caring and respect in approaching a topic of which students all have different levels of understanding or experience is aligned with the work by Lewis, Schaps and Watson (1996) who posit that learning is not made painless in a community but the differences each individual within the community brings are respected and other members of the community are encouraged to be mindful of the differences in a way that does not compete or hold others' views up in a competitive manner. This type of caring and respect can be fostered by a sense of community.

Intrinsic motivation for the garden project was evident throughout the project as students sought to work together on all aspects of the project from planning, to acquiring community and business support for the needed materials, to the physical labor of installing the garden, to the leadership capacities in bringing the whole school community together including parents,

guardians, and community members to the opening garden ceremony. Much of the project was led by what the students wanted to do and were able to do.

Maria balanced the need to be directly in charge of the project with the need for student involvement, and used a shared leadership approach which is aligned with Schaps and Lewis' (1999) approaches to community as "teachers are still central in the student-centered classroom" (p. 217). For example, Maria allowed for a great deal of student input into the garden project but she was always looking for ways to align the children's interests with curriculum requirements. Both Maria's principal and her mentor teacher, Rosa, were instrumental in providing feedback on this alignment process as well as assuring the garden project was curriculum rich and assessable. Maria also balanced direct instruction with the questions that the children had, particularly in the areas of the project that focused on the psycho-social environment of the classroom, and when questions about dying and death arose. Maria also balanced her direct leadership of the project with Rosa, and with the children in Rosa's class, again aligning with Schaps and Lewis' conclusion that even within student-centered classrooms – teachers are the leaders.

Community Fostered by School Leadership

Maria described the feeling of being "pulled into community" from the beginning of her association with this school as there were questions she remembered from the interview about her willingness to be involved in social events with the faculty. Maria also commented on the leadership of her principal, Pat, who purposefully created an opening for community to develop by allowing for, and scheduling, time to meet with her. Pat also set up specific times for Maria to meet with her mentor teacher, Rosa. Pat had structured the master schedule and duty roster in a way to allow Maria and Rosa joint planning time and time to work together in the daily duties of

teachers – such as playground supervision or supervising the end of the day release of students. Maria also described her principal releasing her from some typical extra duties and asked her to use that time to meet with her mentor teacher. Maria described this time as a time to “chat” and how these chats developed into deeper conversations and discussions and were the opening that allowed her to explore the issues she saw coming up with her students around the deaths that had occurred in the school community. Maria underscored that these chats did not feel forced but were very comfortable and conversational. In earlier research I found the theme of providing time for mentoring was a key component of successful mentoring relationships (Cowin, 2013). Pat is an example of a principal who understood how to structure time for mentoring to occur.

The principal’s leadership also provided experiences for Maria to get to know the other faculty through Friday afternoon get-togethers and holiday events, as well as through her step by step mentorship on a curriculum committee. Maria commented that her principal gave her positive feedback that helped her gain a voice in her work on a faculty committee. She described how her principal gave her both positive feedback and critical critique of her work on the committee. It was this balance of affirming and critical critique that Maria said made her feel “pulled into the community” as there was a balance and she did not believe she was being given just the “good news” or having her work “sugar-coated.” Cherkowski (2012) described how “the impact of emotions in leadership is highlighted as an important consideration for fostering conditions for sustaining learning communities” (p. 56) and Maria’s principal is an example of the type of leader who took time to make connections with her teachers daily – especially her beginning teachers.

Community Building among Teachers

Parsons (2013) describes current research findings in which teachers describe the importance of relationship building among teachers to their own teaching and learning success (p. 11). Five key attributes of professional learning were expanded upon: supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, shared vision and values, supportive communities, and shared personal experience (Parsons, pp. 12-14). When teachers in a particular school come together these are the seeds of community formation that could go on to grow and develop as demonstrated in the portrait of Maria and her mentor teacher, Rosa. Without Rosa's invitation to Maria to form a mentoring relationship there would have been no relationship. The ability of the mentor to offer an invitation to be in a relationship without it seeming forced relies on many interpersonal dynamics. Cowin (2013) described one quality as an openness to the possibility that the mentee/protégé may not willingly enter into relationship and thus a relationship may not happen. Not forcing a mentoring relationship to happen is key. Maria describes this in her portrait as the relationship being formed by mutual interactions, and being "comfortable and conversational" (Personal Communications).

Seeking to discover the effects of operating a classroom as a learning community, Watkins (2005) reviewed three areas of research on classrooms as learning communities: classrooms as communities, classrooms as communities of learners, and classrooms as learning communities seeking to discover what the effects of operating a classroom as learning community were. Watkins reviewed work by Marzano (1998) which was an analysis of over a million learners from combined studies, and found that "metacognition" and "how the classroom engages learners' beliefs and learners' control is crucial" (p. 47). Watkins posits that classrooms as learning communities seek to "embrace both of these conclusions" (p. 47). Studies like these

may help us to more fully understand how community enhances learning of all members within a school and provide two additional lenses through which to view individual learning by members in a classroom or school community.

Community Fostered by the Gift of Time

Maria was very clear that her mentor teacher, Rosa, made time for her every day. She was also very clear that the time was not given with a glance at the clock, but was given generously from the perspective of a veteran teacher who knows what the first years of teaching are like. Maria stated that she felt her questions were welcomed and that feeling of welcome was central to not believing the mentorship was something they both had to do as a matter of school policy or duty. Maria stated that she never had the feeling that she was alone. The themes of being invited into a community, time, and scheduling to create space for community to grow, and the leadership of the principal in structuring the mentorship process in a way that allowed their schedules to align, gave them a joint perspective on their work and roles.

Maria was very clear in her description that her principal saw the time for her to meet with her mentor teacher to have worth to the whole school community in that those teachers who were not serving as mentors had to take on extra duties, such as dismissal after school, to allow Maria and her mentor teacher the time to meet together. This mentoring time was viewed as equally valuable to the entire school community as completing any other duty (Personal Communication).

Community Fostered among the Students

In this school there was a built-in process for community building in that students in primary grades were partnered with upper elementary-aged students with opportunities to work together across the grade levels. This cross-grade level time that was built into the school

schedule allowed for the collaboration among the students in both Maria's and Rosa's classes to grow. The work on the garden project also gave students in both classes many opportunities to form relationships and for community to grow.

Community Fostered among the Parents, Guardians, and the Greater Community

The garden that Maria's and Rosa's students built with the support of the students' parents, guardians, and the school and greater community still stands today. The upper elementary-aged students take great pride in their work with their buddy grade primary-aged students at the school. This tradition has grown and is a positive characteristic that is recognized within the school district and local community where the school was located. There have been other deaths within the community of students and their family members over the years and within the district and Maria's work has served as a model for other school communities. This is a community where events at the school are well attended and supported not only in a financial manner but in the way community members hold their local school in high esteem as seen on billboards, posters and other public notices that are displayed publically and in private businesses (Impressionist Record).

Finally

I presented this portrait of community building influenced by themes of caring, compassion, empathy, sympathy, and mentoring as an example of hope for all who read it. I believe this portrait offers insights into how community interacts with mentoring themes such as how to extend an invitation to be in a mentoring relationship, welcome, time, and adept mentoring practices by both a principal and veteran teacher serving as a mentor to a beginning teacher. The portrait and its analysis may offer other readers insights into the importance of community as a component of educational practice that could be discussed with inservice

teachers who serve as mentors for beginning teachers, and may serve as the basis for continuing dialogue among teacher educators who work with pre-service teachers, their cooperating teachers, and school leaders. There is also potential for this portrait with its intersection of community and mentoring to provide insight to both beginning and inservice school leaders and those who mentor them. This portrait also demonstrates in action benefits to the children in Maria's and Rosa's classrooms on many levels. For example, the students learned about science and mathematics curriculum topics related to the gardening project, and also incorporated language arts and design elements as well as leadership and service learning topics to make connections to business community partners for the needed gardening materials. Then there are the topics related to the psycho-social issues of life, dying and death, not only for those children directly affected by their parents' deaths but also for the children and adults who may respond to others experiencing the turmoil that death brings. Topics such as compassion, caring, empathy, and sympathy were central themes to the students' curriculum that year, but this curriculum also drew in the parents and guardians and eventually the entire school community to a greater awareness of these issues that may not be directly stated in the curriculum, but are components of classroom and school life. My greatest hope is that this portrait may offer educative examples of how community can be lived out in classrooms and schools.

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